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DELIVERED TO THE
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OF THE
ARCHDEACONRY
OF
COLCHESTER,
IN JUNE, M.DCC.LXXII.

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AND
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M.DCC.LXXIII.

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Reverend Brethren,

IT may be justly reckoned among the happy circumstances of the times, in which we have lived; that, having had few occasions to engage in, or attend to, controversies, about curious and speculative questions; we have been usually at liberty to inculcate such doctrines only, as might inform the understanding, and influence the conduct of our hearers: without turning their thoughts, or our own, to those disputed points, which, if not placed quite beyond the reach of human faculties, are yet far removed from life and manners. But this happiness seems at present to be in some degree

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gree interrupted. Errors, which we thought buried in oblivion, are now again called forth; and, though relating only to some nice and difficult subjects, which require the utmost attention of the learned and contemplative; are industriously spread in small treatises among the common people: whilst we, the Clergy, are urged to examine anew matters, which we have long considered as certain; and are told, that our system of Christianity, transmitted to us, it seems, from ages of ignorance and bigotry, may and ought to receive improvements, corresponding to those, which the present enlightened age has made in every other Science. The reputation of modern Philosophers is turned to the disgrace of modern Divines; as neither emulating the example, nor accepting the assistance, which the discoveries of those strict reasoners might afford them.

If this complaint against us has any foundation, we should all unite our endeavours

deavours to remove it. If none, yet it may be proper to enquire, whence the mistake has arisen. Were we to collect a scheme of Christian knowledge from the ablest modern writers, to compare it with the doctrines of former ages, and to observe the gradual improvements it has received; the review would furnish us with a direct answer to the whole objection. But so extensive an undertaking is not at all suited to the present occasion. And it will be sufficient to remove the principal grounds of the complaint, if we can shew, that in one part of our studies we have taken the full benefit of the advanced state of Philosophy; and that in the other parts no benefit is to be expected from it.

The English Divines cannot be justly reproached with the extravagant zeal of those, who, disclaiming the use of reason in religious enquiries, would substitute in it's room faith uninformed. They own indeed the sovereignty of Religion;

but are sensible, that her throne can nowhere be fixt securely, except in the understanding. They have never spared any pains to establish it on this firm basis. And when new discoveries in philosophy have offered it any new supports, they have not failed to apply them. This could hardly be otherwise : since the same men, who have gained our admiration by a fertile invention, or clear judgment, in the various kinds of human learning, have been, many of them, equally eminent for their proficiency in sacred science. But when in the study of Religion, they used the assistance of philosophy, they used it with great caution; well knowing, that tho' it's guidance may be safely trusted, while it has full light, and keeps within it's own territories; yet when it ventures to conduct us in the dark, or wanders beyond it's proper limits, it will often mislead us more fatally than ignorance itself. For there is a chain, which connects the different branches of error, as well as of truth.

truth. Yet this just and necessary caution seems to have given occasion to the complaint before mentioned. No other grounds for it have ever been pretended. It was never objected to us, that the evidences for religion are not fully stated, or that any kind of fair reasoning is neglected, which might serve to enforce them. On the contrary, it is universally acknowledged, that more rational, more truly philosophical, defences of Christianity have appeared, within a century, in our language, than were ever produced in any other age or country. In these defences, whatever aids could be borrowed from morals, or physics, or natural theology, have been employed, and sometimes even with profusion. Philosophy has furnished us with abundance of incontestable evidence; and has rendered that evidence the more convincing, by rejecting all such proofs, as were either false or frivolous. Thus far it has acted within it's own province, and has been a good witness in behalf of Christianity.

anity. But here it's office ends. If a witness should be allowed to take the seat of the Judge, we could expect nothing but a hasty and partial decision. And such has been the event, when philosophy has presumed to interpret revealed doctrines, or to examine the reasonableness of revealed dispensations. These are the uses which we have forbore to make of it, and which we shall still forbear, if we form our judgment, either from the nature of the attempt, or from the bad success of those, who have engaged in it.

First then, philosophical notions can never lead us to the true meaning of the holy scriptures. The right interpretation of any book is the discovery of the thoughts, which the Author intended to convey. But an Author cannot intend to convey thoughts, which were never in his own mind. And the first preachers of Christianity, being no philosophers, could not entertain notions peculiar to
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philosophers. The one among them, who had some acquaintance with Grecian literature, and might therefore have been suspected of an attachment to this study, expressly disavows, in the names both of himself, and his fellow labourers, all human wisdom. But had they been versed in the learning of their own times, still every later discovery must be foreign from their ideas, and useless in explaining them. — What has been said of the teachers of Christianity, is true also of their disciples. Few of them were called from the portico of Chrysispus, or the groves of Academus. St. Paul complains, that the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world, knew not God, nor received his messengers; that men, whose profession was wisdom, perished through folly; and that the arguments, the artifices, of those, who were reputed learned, and Masters of reason, when applied to religious subjects, were found to be weakness and deceit. He would therefore never instruct his disciples

ples out of the maxims, or principles, of that science, which he knew they did not, and wished they might not, understand. — Nay, he repeatedly cautions them not to be misled by these principles: a caution then necessary against infidelity, when each of the prevailing sects was founded in some error unfavourable to the reception of Christianity; and no less necessary afterwards against heresy, when the philosophers became Christians, and brought, out of the schools into the Church, many useless and dangerous refinements. And what has been the consequence of these refinements; whether introduced, as in the early ages, by the fantastical followers of Plato, or as in our times, by the lovers of metaphysical subtilty; but to turn a religion, whose principal aim was to render men kind and friendly to each other, into a perpetual source of divisions and animosities? One single article of faith would furnish us with examples of this mischievous folly, both early and recent.

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The past I omit, as of less concern to us; and shall content myself with suggesting to your thoughts, that the difficulties, which are now urged against us, concerning the divinity of our Saviour, are not derived from the scriptures, but from the mixture, of what is called philosophical reasoning, in the interpretation of them.

When the sacred Writers stile the Son God, it is doubted, in what sense we are to understand the appellation. May not the word, it is asked, sometimes fall, from it's proper and primary meaning, to one less exact, and less exalted? We shall readily answer, that the only proper use of any word is that, in which it is generally understood; and that this use, in the present instance, is not difficult to be discovered, or to be reconciled with the other declarations of holy scripture. The principal notions, which have ever been annexed to the name of God by plain men, who have not puzzled
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themselves with abstract speculations, are those of Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the World. Now the passages of the new testament, which describe the Son under these characters, are such, as could hardly have been misinterpreted, had not the obvious sense of them appeared to be inconsistent with certain imaginary principles of Science. With the ideas of Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world, those of unlimited power and knowledge are necessarily connected. But the Scriptures have not left us to infer these attributes from his nature. All power and all knowledge are expressly ascribed to the Son of God, in several plain passages. It might have seemed unnecessary to tell us, but yet we are told, that He, who created all things, was before all things. The terms, Father and Son, convey to us no meaning, if they do not imply that the one derived his being from the other. And this is confirmed, when we read, that the Son's power and glory and dominion

minion were all given him by the Father. Thus far the doctrine seems clear. Few sober interpreters of the new testament disagree about these parts of it. But here the Metaphysician comes in, and tells us, that self-existence, and necessary existence, and absolute independency are essential attributes of the Deity; and that he has searched the scriptures in vain to find them ascribed to the Son. He might have added, or to the Father. Neither these terms, nor others of a like import occur in the new testament. If they express any ideas, (other than the negative one of Being not derived,) they are the ideas of Philosophers, not of Apostles; and the logical or metaphysical controversies, which have been spun out of them, are not connected, or but by the slightest clue, with the doctrines of Christ. The same misplaced curiosity, the same vain hope of improving by our discoveries the revelations of God, has introduced into this subject numberless questions, which may ever be disputed,

because they can never be decided; unless men should at last be so wise, as to perceive, that this is a reason, why they should not be disputed at all.

But if our Philosophers have had little success in searching for recondite senses of scripture, their mistakes are more shameful and more dangerous, when they presume to judge of the divine œconomy; when they determine a revealed dispensation to be credible, or not, from preconceived notions of fitness and propriety, of justice and impartiality, which they boldly apply to the government of the supreme Being. He cannot, they tell us, act in this manner; it would be contrary to his wisdom: nor in that; it would be inconsistent with his justice: one kind or degree of happiness he must be disposed to grant; another his creatures have a right to demand. But whilst they throw out these peremptory assertions, not warranted by the observable course of God's moral govern-

government, nor by any known declarations of his will, they shew themselves to be unacquainted with the fundamental rule of their own science, and with the origine of all it's late improvements. They argue like men, who lived two centuries ago, inattentive to the difference between hypothesis and experiment. If, from a supposed character of the Deity, they undertake to derive his acts, and to trace the order of his providence; however ingeniously the system may be formed, and by whatever demonstrations the several parts of it may be connected; yet the whole, having no foundation, but a precarious and arbitrary hypothesis, is easily overthrown. True philosophy would have taught them to proceed the other way: to begin with observing the present constitution of the world; with considering attentively, how God has made us, and in what circumstances placed us; and then to form a sure judgment, from what He has done, what it is agreeable to infinite wis-

wisdom, and the other divine perfections, that He should do. They might thus have learnt the invisible things of God, from those which are clearly seen, the things which are not yet accomplished, from those which are.

How little we can advance in this part of our studies by merely abstract reasoning, one instance will be sufficient to prove. Nothing in the Christian scheme has been more strongly agitated by these philosophizing Divines, than the doctrine of an atonement, made by Jesus Christ, for the sins of mankind. And their arguments are so plausible, that some of the mistaken Friends have joined with the more artful enemies of religion, in representing such atonement, as unnecessary, ineffectual, and unworthy of the righteous Governor of the world. God's laws, it is alleged, are productive of happiness; and, to secure this happiness, penalties are annexed to the breach of them. But when they, who have
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transgressed, repent and amend, no good remains to be obtained by the punishment, it has answered it's ends, is now become useless, and cannot therefore be inflicted by a wise and merciful Governor. To offer redemption to a reformed penitent, is to offer him, what he does not want. He has redeemed himself. He has made all the satisfaction for his offences, that he is able to make; and more cannot be required of him without manifest absurdity.—But supposing that some further satisfaction might be required, the objectors still urge, that it cannot be made effectually by any but the sinner himself; that the sufferings of one person, especially of an innocent one, can never be a reason for the pardon of another; and that God's justice, which is impartial and universal, will still hang over the unpunished offender, and his mercy provide a recompence for the innocent sufferer. — They observe farther, that the Governor of the world usually accomplishes his designs by regular

gular established methods; and that there seems to be no connexion between the sufferings and death of Christ, and the future happiness of mankind; or, if there be any connexion, that it must be, because his sufferings and death were means of reforming sinners, not because they were an expiation or atonement for sin.

These objections, it must be acknowledged, have in them some truths. But with these truths are mixed many things that want proof, and more that are evidently false. Thus it is undoubtedly true, that we can discover so many benefits arising even from the punishments, by which the laws of God's moral government are enforced, as clearly shew the wisdom and goodness of the Governor. But that the uses we can discover, are the only uses of those punishments, is uncertain. And that the punishments must always cease, when the criminals are reformed, is certainly false. The miseries which, in the regular course of nature,

nature, are the consequences of wickedness, are properly considered as the natural punishments of it. Some of them follow it with a swifter, others with a slower pace; some are transitory, others of longer continuance: but the penitence of a criminal, even before their arrival, affords him no security against the flowest of them; and when either his fears or his feelings have worked a reformation, such as are naturally of longer continuance are not by that reformation presently removed. Whatever then can be alleged, concerning the ends of punishment, or the satisfaction made by a reformed penitent, when applied to this subject, must be trifling. All argumentation is here precluded. We have fact and experience to convince us, that God does not always pardon the repenting sinner. — But it is thought incredible, that God should be moved, by the sufferings of the innocent, to absolve the guilty. Yet has he not so constituted the world, that the miseries, which a man brings upon

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himself by wickedness and folly, are often mitigated, sometimes wholly taken away, by the goodness and prudence of his parents or friends; who, in their endeavours to relieve him, submit to labour, and pain, and vexation, such vexation perhaps, as ends in sickness or in death? Thus a man's discharge from punishment may be owing to the misery of persons better than himself, and that which is objected to as incredible, appears to be what often happens in the natural course of human events, that is, by God's appointment. — When it is farther insinuated, against the usefulness of a redemption, that we see no connexion between the cause and the effect, the doubt is wholly unphilosophical. The notion of that connexion is raised in our minds by a frequent repetition of like events, one after the other; and therefore it can have no place between two events, however inseparable in their nature, when one of them appears to be single in its kind, and of the other we have yet had no experience.

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We have seen then, how weak, and yet how dangerous all our reasoning is, when it would correct the doctrines of revelation; and how unjust the censure thrown upon the English clergy for not making use of the present improved state of science. They have used it and to the greatest advantage there, where only it could be used for the service of religion; in providing evidence, in examining it, in selecting the sounder and weightier parts of it, and in casting away those which are light or corrupt. But they have wisely avoided the application of it, where such application is impertinent, or profane: impertinent, as in the interpretation of scripture; profane, as in judging of God's decrees. Neither can it be employed to the former purpose, by those, who are acquainted with the characters of the first teachers of christianity, or of their converts; nor to the latter, by those who attend to the general grounds of all science, or to the means, by which we discover the perfections of the

the Deity. We have seen also examples of the errors, into which philosophy has led it's votaries, taken from two of the great and distinguishing doctrines of Christianity. The examples were not of my choice. I had many others in view. But these seemed to be particularly pointed out. They, who are calling upon us to amend our faith, reckon them among the parts, which chiefly want amendment. If some of our predecessors have written obscurely, or perhaps unintelligibly concerning them, it was not thro' neglect of the philosophy, which prevailed in their times, but thro' too much attention to it. And though we may think our knowledge much advanced, we find it equally unable to reach the gates of heaven. Such gigantic attempts have always proved the ruin, as well as the disgrace, of human science. A fruitless desire to understand mysteries, that is, to understand the whole of what God has revealed in part only, is sure to turn the mind from real knowledge to metaphysical jargon. The great leader

leader of all our modern discoveries, the sagacious and comprehensive Lord Bacon, formed no expectations, in the behalf of religion, or philosophy, of any improvements to be made in either, by the assistance of the other: on the contrary, he foresaw the mischiefs they would mutually receive from an improper alliance. When he is taking a review of all the parts of learning, and observing the defects of each, he has a remarkable passage, which I wish to leave impressed upon your minds: “In this part of
 “knowledge, says he, touching divine
 “philosophy, I am so far from noting
 “any deficiency, as I rather note an excess; whereunto I have digressed, because
 “cause of the extreme prejudice, which
 “both religion and philosophy have received, and may receive, by being
 “mixed together; as that, which undoubtedly
 “will make an heretical religion, and an imaginary and fabulous philosophy.”



leader of all our modern philosophers,
against the metaphysical foundation
of religion, or philosophy, of any kind,
means to be made a leader, by the
influence of the other: on the other hand,
to make the mistake they would make,
only to come from an opposite point.
When he is taking a view of the
point of teaching, and seeing that the
idea of each, as has a necessary
idea, which I wish to have explained
upon your mind: I am not
"A new system, but a new way of
philosophy, I am not
"any doctrine, as I have said,
"only, whereas I have said,
"of the nature of the
"both of them, and
"of each, and the
"mixed together, as
"doubtless, will
"right, and
"our philosophy."

